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BPU Power Plant Employees Celebrate Two Years without a Lost-Time Accident

Jamestown Board of Public Utilities (BPU) Power Plant employees recently celebrated 750 days without a lost-time accident at the facility. The utility commended the 25 employees of the Samuel A. Carlson Generating Station with the awarding of safety recognition shirts.

Power Supply Manager and Engineer David Gustafson, who oversees the Plant as part of his position, noted that with all the different types of equipment in the Power Plant, achieving this milestone does more than anything else to demonstrate that BPU employees are working together to keep their work environment safe.

“We are proud of our employees for reaching this accomplishment in such a difficult work setting,” said Gustafson.

Power Plant Operations Supervisor Steven Dineen attributes the accomplishment to the support of the BPU Board of Directors, Management, the Safety Compliance Administrator and to the employees themselves.

“All employees at the Power Plant look for and demand the very highest of safety standards in all our operations,” says Dineen. “This emphasis on safety is not based on just what we say, but more importantly, by what we do and how we do it.”

Power Plant Manager Steven B. Kulig pointed out that safety has become the culture at the power plant as well as throughout the entire utility.

“At the Power Plant and throughout the utility, we are working to institute a culture of safety,” explains Kulig. “We started first by talking about safety, and then began holding monthly educational meetings about some aspect of safety. Now we have reached the point where, before any project is begun, the employees first discuss how to do the job safely. ‘Safety First’ has become more than a slogan – our employees actually are thinking safety.”

The supervisors said that they have an open door policy, where employees speak with managers about any safety concerns. If employees believe there is a safety issue of any sort, they have the authority to stop the job.

“In walking around the plant now,” says Kulig, “it is normal to encounter employees who are talking about how to accomplish a project in the safest way possible.”

Dineen began holding monthly safety meetings at least two years ago, working with a safety handbook from the American Public Power Association (APPA). While the monthly meetings continue, the BPU in early 2011 created the position of a safety compliance administrator and hired a lifelong veteran of “industrial hygiene” to assist in creating written policies, procedures and training in safety throughout the utility.

BPU Safety Compliance Administrator Marty Tatoian is a Buffalo native who has worked in private industry with the Peter Paul/Cadbury Company, in government for the Department of Defense and for the New York Department of Health at Roswell and as a private consultant. As a consultant, Tatoian assisted organizations such as the Erie County Water Authority, ITT Standards, Ford Motor Company and Ecology and Environment. A graduate of Erie County Community College, the University of Arkansas and Arkansas State University, Tatoian is happy to be back in Western New York, without the constant traveling required as a consultant.

Power Plant Electrician Mitch Simons, who has worked at the BPU for ten years, mentions that observing the hiring of a safety compliance administrator who is working to improve safety in the utility indicates that BPU management really cares about its employees and the importance of safety.

“While safety efforts are always on-going through training,” says Simons, “we’re seeing a huge improvement here. While we always tried to be safe, we are making strides from where we were. Money and action is being placed behind safety standards – we aren’t just talking about safety.”

“While change is hard for some,” adds Simons, “for the most part, employees embrace the emphasis on safety. All of us are learning to respect this change.”

While Dineen continues his monthly safety meetings with the employees at the Power Plant, Tatoian provides more extensive training such as blood borne pathogens, hazard materials communications, hearing conservation, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), arc flash prevention, respiratory protection and other topics of importance to the Public Employee Safety and Health Bureau (PESH) and the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

“The hiring of a safety compliance administrator helps us document training as well, with someone tracking what needs to happen and what has been done,” adds Dineen.

Tatoian trains employees on various topics throughout the utility and is working with the Human Resources Director David Watkins, General Manager David L. Leathers as well as others in developing written safety procedures and policies.

One such program is the “Near Miss” program which encourages employees to report events that could have developed into an accident. Any employee may fill out such a form about a situation which the Safety Compliance Administrator investigates. Near Miss reports and solutions are discussed in meetings and an effort is taken to prevent Near Misses from becoming actual accidents in which someone is injured. Reported Near Misses have ranged from the need to tighten loose railings to actually cutting a window into a solid door that nearly hit passing employees as it opened.

Part of the Safety Compliance Administrator's job is to investigate other aspects of the utility such as hearing testing, to be sure work around certain machinery or in certain areas does not adversely affect employee hearing. Another job of the Safety Compliance Administrator is to monitor Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), checking it on a periodic basis to be certain it is still effective. Various work settings are evaluated for possible safety protective needs.

"Many of our employees work in dangerous situations," states General Manager David Leathers. "They work with electricity, underground piping, big vehicles, rotating machinery, electric substations - we're in the traffic, in the streets. A majority of situations in which our employees work have potential for serious injury."

"We know that we've had serious accidents in the past, and through continued improvements, training, policy, communications and commitment, we are working hard to achieve no accidents at the BPU in the future," continues Leathers. "Over time, this on-going effort will make the environment safer."

"What the Power Plant employees have accomplished, two years without a lost-time accident, is extremely noteworthy," continues Leathers. "It's what we expect as an organization in all departments and divisions. In the Power Plant, all of our collective efforts are showing the results we expect to achieve which is extremely important. I commend David Gustafson, Steven B. Kulig, Steve Dineen and the entire power plant team of talented and committed employees."